



SLDS Issue Brief

Identifying SLDS Users and Their Information Needs

As states develop and use their statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDSs)—whether P-20W+ (early childhood through workforce) or sector-specific in scope—they may struggle to identify and prioritize their end users and those users' information needs. To overcome these challenges, states should begin by reflecting on the purpose and intended outcomes of their SLDS, identify and prioritize the users it should serve, and then assess the system's capacity to support the identified uses (see figure 1). During this process, states should identify other data systems and resources already available to their intended SLDS end users to prevent duplication of effort or confusion. This document provides some essential questions and considerations to help states through this critical process.

What Is the Purpose of the SLDS? (Why?)

Why are you building the SLDS? That is, what are the system's intended purposes and impact? Consider these guiding questions:

- What changes are you trying to effect?
- What aspects of the education and/or workforce system's policies and programs are you trying to improve?
- What types of decisions do you want the system to inform?
- What questions should be answered to inform those decisions?

For Whom Is the SLDS Intended, and What Will It Do for Them? (Who? and What?)

Who are the system's planned end users, and what are their information needs? Your answers to these questions should be informed largely by your *Why*—the intended purpose(s) of the system—and by the current context—the information already available to these users from other resources. Consider the following specific questions:

- Which stakeholders can or should benefit from using the information in the SLDS?
- Whose behaviors do you want to influence with the information from the system?
- What is the value of meeting these users' needs? In other words, how would their use of evidence to support their work contribute to achieving the overarching goals of the SLDS?
- How should you prioritize these users? That is, in what order will you focus on specific stakeholders in the development and rollout of the system?
 - Consider the current information environment when prioritizing stakeholders. Do some user groups already have access to much of the information they need through their organization's data systems or other organizations' systems? Do other user groups have relatively little information available to them?
- What is the unique value that the SLDS can offer these stakeholders?

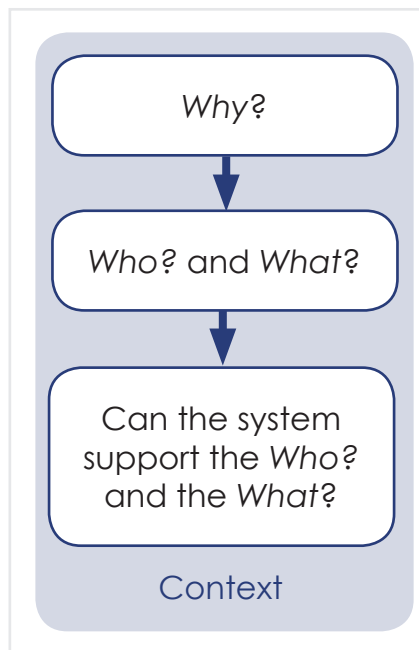


Figure 1. The process of identifying and assessing SLDS users and uses

This product of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) SLDS Grant Program was developed with the help of knowledgeable staff from state education agencies and partner organizations. The information presented does not necessarily represent the opinions of the IES SLDS Grant Program.

For more information on the IES SLDS Grant Program or for support with system development, please visit <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds>.

Table 1 presents some of the key SLDS user groups, their interests in better information about the education system and beyond, and some specific ways in which they might use the data.

Can the System Support the *Who?* and the *What?*

What is the system's capacity to meet the identified users' needs? Ideally, the state agency or entity leading the data system effort will consider the *Why?*, *Who?*, and *What?* early in the system design process before developing a system to meet those needs. However, this does not always happen, and user needs invariably evolve over time. Consequently, states may need to revisit these questions.

Once you have identified the users the system will support and the specific information needs it will meet for those users, make a critical assessment of the system's capacity to meet those needs. If the system cannot meet key requirements, the state or entity leading the data system effort will have to either build additional capacity or revisit its list of intended users and uses, adjusting it based on the system's capacity and available data. For each user group, consider key questions around four aspects of data and data use:

- *Content:* Given the existing universe of data, what kinds of information does the SLDS have and what could be added to it to meet the users' needs? Does your system contain the breadth of information

User	Interest/Need	Examples of Data Use
Policymakers and Legislators	Inform the development or revision of policies and resource allocation decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions to increase funding for workforce preparation programs that show evidence of improving job placement rates and average salaries for participants • Revisions to the state education agency's school accreditation policy based on research showing which school attributes are most directly correlated with improved student outcomes
Program Leaders	Improve program effectiveness and efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to a prekindergarten program's outreach strategy based on evidence that certain cities have significant rates of eligible, unserved children • Elimination of an industry certification based on evidence that certification recipients have the lowest job placement rates and a projected reduction in demand for work in the field
Educators	Inform decisions to improve instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions to pursue professional development aligned with specific instructional areas of need based on students' growth and outcomes • Expanded higher-level math course offerings based on evidence that enrollment in these courses improves students' preparedness and persistence in college
Researchers	Assess the impact of policies and programs on students, workers, and education and workforce entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact evaluation of a funding formula change on the schools serving the highest percentage of low socioeconomic status students • Identification of the most critical factors in K12 course taking that lead to improved college preparedness and persistence
Parents and Students	Support learning and future opportunities and inform decisions about placement in schools, programs, and courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions about the early learning program in which to enroll their child • Determinations about which colleges to apply to based on academic preparedness and fields of interest

Table 1. End user groups and their interests in SLDS data

needed to answer key questions for each user role? That is, does the system include data from multiple sectors that allow for long-term longitudinal analysis? What granularity of data do or will you have about students and individuals (e.g., demographic, program participation, achievement, and outcomes data), and about the entities that serve those individuals (e.g., institution, program, and staff data)?

- *Timeliness:* Compare the timing of SLDS data refresh cycles to when the users need information for decisionmaking, reporting, or other identified purposes throughout the year. Does the system provide users with data that are current enough to be useful and can be used at these key points in time?
- *Access:* What types of information and levels of access will be offered to different users? For instance, will you provide secure, role-based access to individual-level data, or only to aggregate data? Will

users be offered static—or “canned”—reports, or will they be able to run custom data queries? What kind of access is necessary and appropriate to ensure that the intended users actually use the information to inform their decisions and influence their actions?

- *Support:* How will you support users and prepare them to understand and use the data effectively? Support is especially important for stakeholders with little or no previous data use experience. How will you vet the system’s information products with each type of user to ensure that they are intuitive and meet the stakeholders’ needs? What training or professional development is needed to help users develop the capacity to use the data appropriately?

Use the worksheet on page 4 to organize your responses as you identify users, determine their information needs, and assess the system’s capacity to support them.

Additional Resources

Stakeholder Engagement & Data Use: Helping Stakeholders Get the Most from an SLDS
<https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/5904>

Stakeholder Engagement Plan Guide & Template
<https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/3083>

Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit: Traversing ‘Stakeholder Land’
<https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/2639>

State Desired Outcomes and Determine Purpose Statement: An In-Depth Look
<https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/5244>

SLDS Users and Uses Worksheet

Why? <i>List the intended purposes of the SLDS</i>	Who? <i>Identify key SLDS users</i>	What? <i>Determine the users' data needs</i>	Current Capacity <i>Assess how well the SLDS can meet these user needs</i>
			Content: Timeliness: Access: Support:
			Content: Timeliness: Access: Support:
			Content: Timeliness: Access: Support:
			Content: Timeliness: Access: Support: